



Best Practice: Environmental Performance System for Businesses

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CITY: HELSINKI

POLICY AREAS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; ENVIRONMENT

BEST PRACTICE

In 2008, the City of Helsinki and its Environmental Department launched the EcoCompass Environmental Management System as a program to encourage companies based in the Helsinki Metropolitan area to both enhance their business operations and decrease their environmental impact. The EcoCompass system was developed specifically for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME's). Companies receive easy to use tools and customized support for the implementation and maintenance of their environmental management programs.

ISSUE

EcoCompass was created to decrease the environmental impact of the 65,000 small and medium-sized companies in the Helsinki Metropolitan area. The EcoCompass Environmental Management System is part of the Nordic Environmental Network, which coordinates environmental management programs throughout Nordic countries and has been developed to meet its demanding criteria.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this project was to create an operating model for Helsinki's small and medium-sized companies to strengthen their environmental performance while enhancing a company's business operations.

IMPLEMENTATION

From 2008-2011 the EcoCompass pilot project was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Center for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The key partners are the municipalities of Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Kauniainen, the Helsinki Region Environmental Services Authority, the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, and the Regional Organization of Enterprises in Helsinki.

During the formation of the project, an operating model for voluntary cooperation between the cities and the SME's was created. The operating model includes business advisors, who contact new and existing companies that can influence environmental aspects like planning property and waste management. The EcoCompass project works in close cooperation with the economic and enterprise services of the city by training advisors to be familiar with the environmental issues that companies face and advise their customers on these issues.

During the pilot stage of this project, the focus was on companies from different industries such as travel and printing companies as well as companies from the City of Helsinki Wholesale Market area.

From summer of 2011 onwards, EcoCompass services will move from the Environment Centre to the Climate Info Centre. Climate Info Centre is a service established by the cities of Helsinki Metropolitan area which helps the residents and SMEs reduce their carbon footprint by making more climate friendly choices.

Participating companies receive easy tools like templates, check-lists, a reporting system and customized support for the implementation and maintenance of their environmental management program. This includes an initial analysis of the company's current environmental measures and the creation of an environmental management program within the company.

After a company works with EcoCompass for 6 to 12 months, the company reports back to the Climate Info Centre. After reporting, an external audit is performed by a third party. If the company passes the audit, the company receives the

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EcoCompass certificate, which is valid for three years. The companies can use the EcoCompass certificate in their marketing activities and can benefit from it in public procurement tendering. In the spring of 2011 the first EcoCompass Gala was organized, where the audited companies received their EcoCompass certificates from the Mayor of the city.

COST

The first-year investment and annual budget of the program has been about 150,000 Euros (\$185,655 USD).

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Following the pilot project phase, companies demonstrated improvement in their environmental performance, and based on discussions with several companies, many have reported that they have become more competitive. The EcoCompass EMS was evaluated to be easy to implement. In particular, the personal guidance, tailored training and EcoCompass ready forms have received positive feedback from the companies. So far, approximately 24 pilot companies have received the EcoCompass certificate, 20 business advisors have been trained to include environmental issues in their advisory work, and approximately 200 entrepreneurs have been trained on environmental issues. An operating model for voluntary environmental cooperation between the cities and the SME's has successfully been created.

TIMELINE

EcoCompass pilot stage was a three-year project that began June 2008 and concluded May 2011. As of July 2011, 24 pilot companies have received an EcoCompass certificate. From summer 2011 onwards, the EcoCompass services will be provided by Climate Info Centre. The aim is to get 20 companies annually to implement EcoCompass.

LEGISLATION

No direct legislation was enacted or changed pertaining to this program. However, the pilot SME's will become more aware of environmental legislation throughout and after this project.

LESSONS LEARNED

The EcoCompass project has been rather challenging to carry out because there are various entities that require a large amount of time and resources. The main program components that have been time consuming to develop are as follows:

- Developing the EcoCompass environmental management system
- Creating tailor-made support for companies in Helsinki
- Training business advisors
- International cooperation due to different environmental management standards and different languages spoken

Since it is challenging to implement training regarding environmental issues, long-term cooperation is needed for training business advisors.

TRANSFERABILITY

EcoCompass is a part of the Nordic Environment Network, which aims to provide tangible, relevant, practical and economically beneficial methods for working with and documenting environmental management, particularly among the Nordic countries. As mentioned, the EcoCompass Environmental Management System has been developed to correspond to the criteria of the Nordic Environment Network.



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The EcoCompass Environmental Management System has also been chosen to be showcased in the European Union Commission's study, "Guidelines for Transition from non-formal Environmental Management System (EMS) and International Standardization Organization (ISO) 14 001 to the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)." The report shows how an environmental management system that requires less documentation, reporting, and one that is action-focused can also fulfill the requirements of EMAS.

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